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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 006671

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TAGS: [PREL MARR IS ISRAELI PALESTINIAN AFFAIRS GAZA DISENGAGEMENT COUNTERTERRORISM GOI EXTERNAL](#)

SUBJECT: ISRAELI DEFENSE MINISTER OFFERS CAUTIOUSLY  
OPTIMISTIC ASSESSMENT OF CHANCES FOR ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN  
SECURITY COOPERATION

Classified By: Ambassador Daniel C. Kurtzer; Reasons: 1.4 (B) and (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY: During a meeting on December 30, Israeli Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz gave Senator Lieberman and the Ambassador a cautiously optimistic assessment of the chances for security cooperation with post-Arafat Palestinian leaders. Mofaz said that disengagement will increase Israel's security and permit the government to "start a dialogue and implement the road map." He acknowledged that the new Palestinian leaders will need time to dismantle the terrorist infrastructure, but insisted that they stop incitement and actual terrorist attacks quickly. Mofaz described cooperation between Israeli and Palestinian forces in the field as "very good." He raised Syrian and Iranian threats, noting that Syria supports terrorism, headquarters Palestinian groups in Damascus, continues to station troops in Lebanon, and permits Hizballah to operate against Israel. Mofaz urged the U.S. to take the lead with the Europeans and pursue all diplomatic solutions, including sanctions and thorough inspections, required to halt the Iranian's enrichment process. END SUMMARY.

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Mofaz Upbeat on Possible Security Cooperation  
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12. (C) In a December 28 meeting with Senator Joseph Lieberman, the Ambassador, Senate staff and military escort from the CoDel, Israeli Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz noted that Arafat's death has resulted in a "dramatic" change and a "historic opportunity." He expressed hope that the upcoming elections will produce a "responsible and effective leadership ... to lead the Palestinian people in a new direction." Mofaz said that disengagement will increase Israel's security and permit the government to "start a dialogue and implement the road map."

13. (C) Senator Lieberman said he had also detected a willingness for a "a new beginning" among Palestinian leaders and asked Mofaz specifically what steps Israel wanted them to take to return to the road map. Mofaz replied that he thinks the new Palestinian leaders are serious about stopping terror, but Israel must wait and see how they act after the elections. He expressed hope that a post-election dialogue will lead to Israeli-Palestinian coordination on the disengagement plan. He added that the PA must reform its security services, reduce the number of independent organizations, and unify command. "We need to see one rule, one authority, one gun," he said. Senator Lieberman commented that the Palestinian leaders themselves had admitted that their security infrastructure is "chaotic." He asked if the Palestinians would benefit from U.S. training. The Defense Minister noted that Egypt has already agreed to train PA security officers.

14. (C) Mofaz acknowledged that the new Palestinian leaders will need time to dismantle the terrorist infrastructure. He insisted, however, that they must stop incitement and actual terrorist attacks quickly. Senator Lieberman asked Mofaz to elaborate on the difference between ending attacks and dismantling infrastructure. Mofaz replied that the first step is to prevent new attacks. The longer-term dismantlement includes disarming terrorist groups, collecting illegal weapons, and preventing re-supply by smugglers.

15. (C) Senator Lieberman asked about the status of cooperation between Israeli and Palestinian security forces. Mofaz noted that the two sides have "very good coordination in the field," primarily in the West Bank. He said Israel had worked well with Dahlan when he was security chief, but will now have to "wait and see" which Palestinian official will command the security forces.

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Mofaz Raises Syrian and Iranian Threats  
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16. (C) Mofaz complained that Syria supports terrorism, headquarters Palestinian groups in Damascus, continues to station troops in Lebanon, and permits Hizballah to operate against Israel. He said that "Syria is deeply involved in terrorism against U.S. forces in Iraq" and insisted that Damascus has "no real intent" to negotiate peace with Israel.

Mofaz listed three conditions for serious peace talks: the removal of Palestinian terrorist groups from Syrian territory; the "dismantlement" of Hizballah (which he said supports Palestinian terrorists by channeling to them Syrian, Iranian, and Saudi resources); and the return of responsibility for southern Lebanon to Lebanese military forces. Senator Lieberman agreed that Syrian peace overtures are intended to distract the international community from what Syria is doing in Iraq and Lebanon. He said Congress is currently examining its options on how to deal with the problem.

17. (C) Mofaz cautioned that Iran is "very close -- less than one year away --" from enriching uranium, which he described as a "point of no return" for the Iranian nuclear program. This effort is widely supported by the Iranian government and Majlis, he said. Mofaz confided that Israel "does not see results" from the EU-3 negotiations with Iran, which he described as an effort by Tehran to buy time to complete the enrichment process. He urged the U.S. to take the lead with the Europeans and pursue all diplomatic solutions, including sanctions and thorough inspections, required to halt the Iranian's enrichment process. He said that such an effort could lead to success, but "time is running out." Mofaz described Iran, with its extremist regime, support for terrorism, and long-range surface-to-surface missiles, as a threat to Europe and the rest of the free world. Senator Lieberman told the Israelis that he believed the U.S. is ready to actively participate in the diplomatic and U.N. processes to stop the Iranian program, but he expressed skepticism that the Europeans and Russia would commit to effective sanctions.

18. (U) Mofaz was accompanied by MOD Director General Amos Yaron, Director of MOD Director for Military-Political Affairs Amos Gilad, Chief of Staff Ami Shafran, Military Secretary to the Minister BG Etan Dangott, Media Adviser Eli

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Kamir, and MFA Director for Congress Meirav Eilon-Shahar.  
Senator Lieberman did not clear this message before his departure.

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